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ABSTRACT

One example of the vast potential of audiovisual techniques as teaching aids may be seen in the successful use of a television tape and a slide-cassette version of a lesson on the comma splice error with community college daytime and evening classes in freshman composition. Results of the posttests administered after presentation of the television tape or slide-cassette lessons consistently showed marked reductions in errors from pretests administered several weeks before the comma splice lesson. Students, impressed by their successes, were eager to have this teaching method used in various other grammatical and mechanical lessons in English. (JM)

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Making Students Thirsty

Bett Kleinmann

The plight of the English teacher is well expressed in this little poem:

> Somebody said it couldn't be done;
> With a smile he went right to it.
> He tackled the thing that couldn't be done
> And--couldn't do it!

Many--if not all of us--who teach English have encountered disinterest, indifference, and ineptitude in our students. We chip away at the barriers to communication, but most of the walls of student resistance still stand. English is often treated with the attitude "I don't need it--I'll never use it, so why bother?"

The fault lies not with the students but with us, and the story of the young salesman attempting to excuse his poor performance to his sales manager comes to mind. The young salesman said, "I've done everything I could, Mr. Jones, but you know the old saying, 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.'" The sales manager responded, "Yeah, I know it. But your job isn't to make them drink. Your job is to make them thirsty!" We have not been making our students thirsty.

Since language is not an end in itself but simply a means to an end--that of clear communication--perhaps we should dramatize the point for our students. English 101 or English 102 might well be Basic Communications Tools 101 or Idea Transfer 102. Why do we cloak the very essence of our

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subject in clouds of academic elements that never make sense to our students as practical application? Language is for communication, and our purpose will be served better when we consciously, enthusiastically, and clearly teach it with that objective kept constantly before our students. They must be dissuaded from their view of English as an imposed evil of dubious value, grudgingly endured--never enjoyed. This problem is somewhat enlarged at community colleges, but it also exists on most campuses, especially in Freshman Composition I classes.

Our administration tried to solve the problem four years ago by instituting an English Writing Lab (EWL) to relieve teachers of individual student problems. When the EWL opened, we cut back considerably on non-transfer remedial classes, thinking that most students could take regular composition credit courses and make up their deficiencies by doing designated lab work. Frequently, however, the student who needed help most had minimal time to spend in the lab.

At the present time in Freshman Composition I, all students are required to take two tests during the early weeks of the course: one covers mechanics and word usage; the other covers spelling. We make individual prescription charts based on testing results and give them to the teachers for distribution. The students are then instructed to correct their deficiencies in the EWL. Theoretically, this procedure frees the teacher to teach theme writing and organization.

We learned quite early that the English Writing Lab was proving helpful, but many students claimed that the audio tapes and the self-programmed

packaged materials were "too long" and that their time was severely limited because of job or family responsibilities or both. While the EWL alleviated the problem, it did not solve it.

With this perplexing situation confronting the EWL, I took an A-V course and was intrigued by the potentialities of graphic media. Exactly how visual media might be adapted to EWL use became apparent as we individually prepared a brief two-camera television lesson presentation, including all graphics used. I decided to devise a way to enliven and clarify students' troublesome deficiencies in writing that would also require less time than present EWL materials now take. If the resulting clarification also increased the retention rate, the EWL might yet be the solution to the impasse of the students' apathetic approach to English.

We therefore decided to test two methods: the television tape, and the slide-cassette presentation. Both were to be shot in color. We decided first to do the television tape, try and test it, and later do the slide-cassette version of the same lesson and then try and test it. If either or both proved more effective than present EWL materials, we intended to develop the better result by working up additional units and incorporating these units as self-help aids.

One of the most constantly recurring mistakes in the area of mechanics is the comma splice error. Because I was seeking a means of determining the relative strength of the proposed audio-visual methods, I drew upon materials currently in use in the EWL to make up a twenty-question pre-test.

This pre-test was administered to 105 students in two daytime and three nighttime classes, all in Freshman Composition I, and without previous class instruction on the comma splice error at our campus. Testing was conducted in the course of the regular class session without time limitations. Of the 2100 exposures to right or wrong answers, 974 were wrong for an error ratio of 46.2%. The pre-tests were not returned to the students, and no further discussion or explication of the comma splice error was made.

Within a period of two weeks following the pre-tests, the classes were then shown my television presentation that explicated by visual means the comma splice error. Immediately after viewing the fourteen-minute lesson, the students in each class took post-tests identical to the pre-tests. Of the 101 tests taken, only 481 of the 2020 exposures to right or wrong answers were incorrectly marked, showing a reduction of errors to 21.8%. This represents an overall gain in perception of 50.4%. Both tests were returned to the students so that they could measure their own learning and ask for clarification where needed. At this time I answered all questions about their errors, just as I do when I work in the EWL.

Although no attempt was made to score individuals, I did want to compare the relative rating of daytime to nighttime classes. Evening students are generally more mature and seem more highly motivated than the younger groups in morning and afternoon classes. In support of this belief, the pre-tests for the two afternoon groups showed a 47.3% error ratio, as opposed to the three evening classes where the error ratio was 42.9%. The post-tests following the television presentation showed a

sharp improvement in the afternoon classes with only 31.3% error ratio; in the evening groups, however, the degree of improvement was even greater with an error ratio of only 20.5%. In terms of perception, the afternoon classes had a 40% gain while the evening classes had a 60.7% gain.

Of special interest is the fact that my 8:50 p.m. class, composed almost entirely of students who work full-time and take three classes on two nights each week, made a 74.5% gain in perception. A performance of this magnitude can, of course, be credited in part to these particular students' desire to learn. Equally evident, however, is the fact that these students cannot be at their best after a full day of work, and that to achieve so marked an improvement required an instructional formula of unusual facility--in this instance the graphic approach of the television presentation.

Six weeks later we tested the retention rate of the three evening classes by giving a post-post-test using a different set of sentences. Of the 1113 exposures to right or wrong answers, 141 were answered incorrectly, showing a further reduction of errors to 12.6%, or an 87.4% retention rate.

The figures are exciting and gratifying. Most impressive was student reaction. As these students reviewed their papers when I returned them and they saw what the method had contributed to their understanding, one question was directed to me over and over again: "When can we try this same kind of thing for . . . ?" They named generalities, such as "all of grammar," to specifics, such as "plural possessive pronouns." Suddenly,

they were acting thirsty!

Meanwhile, I had begun to work on the second phase of our exploratory plan, the slide-cassette presentation. We pre-tested four different daytime classes totaling 83 students but used a simplified version of the initial pre-test. These students showed a 36.2% error ratio with 604 or the 1660 right or wrong answers marked incorrectly. Again we kept the tests and did not discuss them. A few weeks later the students were shown the slide version of the comma splice error correction technique, but neither post-test nor discussion followed the lesson. Three weeks later we gave the post-test, identical to the pre-test, on the assumption that after this length of time had passed, we could get a reasonable measure of true retention rate. This time, of the 1420 exposures to right or wrong answers, only 360 were incorrectly marked, giving a 25.3% error ratio, or a perceptual gain of 32.4% and a retention rate of 74.7%. Both tests were returned to the students.

The evidence we have accumulated is indicative of the vast potential of A-V techniques as teaching aids, not merely as a means for presenting a colorful and comprehensive view of a general concept, as already has been rather widely done, but as a technique for offering instruction in mechanics basic to an understanding of the concept. In English composition, such command of detail is essential to clear, concise, orderly transmission of thought. Failures in proper control of detail cause failures in idea transfers, which is the whole purpose of language.

The findings of the audio-visual presentations we made follow:

1) using a television tape of fourteen minutes and a slide-cassette packet of twelve minutes, both media represented a considerable saving in time compared to their corollaries currently in use in the English Writing Lab;

2) perception rate gains in either medium greatly surpassed the self-programmed instructional packages presently used in the EWL with the same students enrolled in our exploratory program as were using the EWL;

3) retention rates were greatly enhanced through visual media, as demonstrated by the sharp reduction of errors in both post-tests and post-post-tests;

4) evening classes, where desire can often be blunted by weariness, were enlightened and exhilerated by visual media as an instructional technique;

5) instructional drain in time and nervous energy of the instructor were drastically reduced;

6) graphic techniques were proven to be admirably suited to the instructional needs of foreign students as well as others educationally disadvantaged;

7) permanent re-inforcement of learning resulted from immediate post-testing and self-analysis of errors;

8) A-V fulfilled the basic mission of offering optimum service to the community, a mission greatly desired by the administration.

To prepare the visual presentation, I decided to take two closely

related thoughts--"They were married, they went to a motel"--and work with the two thoughts throughout the lesson to show students how to correct or how to avoid making the comma-splice error by using any one of four methods: substituting a period or a semicolon for the comma, adding a coordinating conjunction to the comma, or subordinating one of the main clauses.

The script included an explanation of why each segment was a complete thought having its own subject and predicate, and could therefore stand alone with a period, the first method of correction. The script emphasized, however, that if the student confined himself to this method alone, he would then have a primer style of writing, and that such abruptness would tend to restrict his communication because of the interruptions in the flow of thought from writer to reader.

The next step of the script moved to the second method of correction, joining two independent clauses with a semicolon, in this case because the two ideas are closely related. The lesson emphasized the use of the semicolon only when two thoughts are closely related and of equal weight.

The script then went into the third method, the use of a coordinating conjunction with the comma. The specific purpose and meaning of each coordinating conjunction was stressed in turn.

In the final segment, the script showed that the subordination of a lesser idea conveyed a more exact meaning than would be possible to achieve through using coordinating conjunctions. Thus, expressing specific relationships resulted in greater clarity in writing. The script continued to explain that writing, as opposed to speaking, requires the use of words

rather than gestures, intonations, or pauses to express ideas to the reader. Therefore, students need to use every tool of written communication that will make their written work more clear.

The presentation concluded with a review of the four methods of correcting or avoiding the comma splice error.

With the script completed, I met with the Media Center Director and his staff to discuss what kind of graphics would forcefully illustrate various aspects of the lesson. We discussed cartoons, pictures, lettered cards, cue cards, music, and color tones. After roughing out our ideas, the A-V group prepared a number of colorful graphics and helped me to select my own clothing color scheme to blend with the total effect.

The Media Center completed all of its arrangements and then reserved the television studio to rehearse the script and co-ordinate the other elements of the presentation, and we shot the "take" a few days later. Our six hours in the studio produced a fourteen-minute television tape lesson.

To prepare for the next step of the proposal--the slide-cassette version--I worked through some of the slide-tape lessons already developed in the fields of nursing, history, and biology to determine suitable variety, length, interest, and timing.

The experience that the Media Center staff gained in working in these subject fields was of great value in developing a clear, colorful, and concise presentation. Many slides were drawn from the television tape, and additional slides were designed to expand the concepts we

wished to present. The result was a completed unit of forty-one slides. The accompanying audio element was taped with a signal to maintain the synchronization of sound and slide. In the slide lesson the same material was covered but required two minutes less time, or a total of just twelve minutes.

In spite of the seemingly greater success we had with the television presentation, the slide-cassette appears to be better for our purposes than the television tape. Both are effective, but the greater flexibility of the slide-cassette packet and its easy use in the English Writing Lab persuaded us to choose the slide-cassette. This decision was also prompted by the fact that currently we have ten carrels already equipped with audio, and an additional ten cassettes available for worktable use. Each carrel can readily accommodate a slide viewer and continue to provide individualized instruction. Our decision also depended upon smaller initial expense, fewer maintenance problems, and less overall expense.

Because of our excellent exploratory results with audio-visual packets and our decision to concentrate our development of additional packets on a slide-cassette basis, money has been allocated for the development of a complete series of slide-cassette packets, and for additional equipment we believe necessary to improve the quality of our presentations.

With more than 50% of our total enrollment in night classes, the results obtained in the tested classes are of special interest. Every teacher of night class students recognizes that a dual challenge is present. He must not only provide the same high quality instruction as he does to a

regular class, but he must also provide the extra stimulation needed by students typically already tired from a full day's work. The instructor's burden appears to be significantly reduced, and reduced at a low cost, by the use of audio-visual cassette packages.

Many of us find our relationship to our classes analagous to that of operators of electronic panels seen in space age computer centers. When buttons are punched, lights begin to flash on a board. Like the computer center operators, we also punch buttons in our classes, but rarely see lights flash--or even flicker. Somehow we have not located the right buttons. I think audio-visual techniques will provide the right buttons so that we can help our students communicate better and, at the same time, revitalize our profession.

MAKING STUDENTS THIRSTY

At Tarrant County Junior College, South Campus, in Fort Worth, Texas, we have been intrigued and exhilarated by our initial experimentation with sound-slide presentations aimed at the correction of grammatical errors. As a consequence our school is investing a considerable sum of money in an enlargement of our studies and facilities in the techniques outlined for you during the Convention presentation at CCCC in Philadelphia. Because figures and ratios are always difficult to retain in the course of a presentation, I have prepared the following recapitulation so that those who are interested may study the data at their leisure.

	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TOTAL QUESTIONS	NUMBER WRONG	ERROR PERCENT	
PRE-TEST	105	2100	974	46.2%	
			(2 Day	47.3%)	
	(5 classes)		(3 Night	52.9%)	
					PERCEPTION GAIN
POST-TEST	101	2020	481	21.8%	50.4%
			(2 Day	31.3%	40%)
			(3 Night	20.5%	60.7%)
			(8:30 pm		74.5%)
					RETENTION RATE
POST-POST-TEST (Night Students only)		1113	141	12.6%	87.4%

Should any of you have questions, or should you wish additional information, we'll do our very best to be prompt and helpful. Simply write me

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If you feel the need to talk, don't hesitate to call me here at the convention, Room _____, or in Fort Worth at the college, AC 817 534-4861.

On the preceding sheet you have the figures on the television experiment we did in our English Writing Lab.

On this sheet are the figures for the slide-cassette tests.

	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TOTAL QUESTIONS	NUMBER WRONG	ERROR PERCENT
PRE-TEST	83	1660	604	36.2%
	(4 Day Classes)			

Two weeks later these same students were shown the slide-cassette tape - No Post-Test followed.

Three more weeks elapsed before a Retention Test was given

83	1420	360	25.3%

PERCEPTION GAIN	RETENTION RATE
32.4%	74.7%